

New waterway management fund from boat registration fee increases enables DNREC to take on additional responsibilities for dredging, channel marking, other waterway maintenance

DOVER – Delaware boat registration fee increases that went into effect Jan. 1 will account for all revenue going into a new waterway management fund that enables DNREC's Division of Watershed Stewardship's Shoreline & Waterway Management Section to take better care of the state's coastal waterways. In the wake of lost federal funding, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers no longer dredges navigational channels while U.S. Coast Guard can no longer adequately mark federally-authorized waterways – with both responsibilities now taken on by DNREC.

DNREC is now better positioned and more capable of assuming these waterway maintenance responsibilities through funding from the increase in boat registration fees made possible when the 148th General Assembly passed Senate Bill No. 261, enacted in July 2016. The new law signed by Governor Jack Markell establishes a sustainable and dedicated source of funding (the Waterway Management Fund) to be used exclusively to support maintenance of Delaware's public waterways. The Division of Watershed Stewardship will administer the Waterway Management Fund from the designated waterway management portion of boat registration revenues collected by DNREC's Division of Fish & Wildlife.

DNREC has conducted waterway management operations in Delaware for over 45 years, including dredging, navigational channel marking, and abandoned vessel and derelict structure and debris removal. Over the years, all this has been done solely with legislative appropriations provided by the State's General Assembly. In recent years, appropriations proved to be insufficient for keeping navigational channels open and safe for the state's almost 60,000 registered boats for a number of reasons, according to Charles Williams, of DNREC's Shoreline & Waterway Management Section. He cited the decline in federal funding as responsible for shifting waterway management responsibilities for most state waterways to DNREC.

The legislation for dedicated waterway management funding implements recommendations made by the Delaware Waterways Management and Financing Advisory Committee, which was formed by the passage of Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 64 in 2014. All revenue from increased boat registration fees – now representing 50 percent of total boat registration revenues – will fund the Waterway Management Fund, with 100 percent of increased-fee revenues dedicated to the waterway management fund, and required by law to be utilized for waterway management activities throughout the state.

Boat registration fees have been increased as follows:

- Class A vessel (less than 16 ft.) – \$20.
- Class 1 vessel (16 ft. or over and less than 26 ft.) – \$40.
- Class 2 vessel (26 ft. or over and less than 40 ft.) – \$60.
- Class 3 vessel (40 ft. or over and less than 65 ft.) – \$100.
- Class 4 vessel (65 ft. or over and not required to be documented) – \$120.

In addition, the legislation also increases the current service charge that private licensing agents may charge to process boat registrations and boat ramp certificates, with the service charges being retained by the licensing agents to offset the costs of processing boat registrations and boat

ramp certificates. The increased service charges may not exceed \$5.00 for a boat registration and \$1.50 for a boat ramp certificate.

Fee increases took effect Jan. 1, 2017. Please contact the Division of Watershed Stewardship at 302-739-9921 for more information.

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Vol. 47, No. 4